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Book Reviews

The Apocalypse of St. John. The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices. By HENRY BARCLAY SWETE. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1906. Pp. ccix + 314. \$3.50.

No book of the New Testament has suffered so severely, as regards general reading and homiletic use, as the Apocalypse. The reason is quickly found. So long as the traditional views of inspiration and the canon stood intact, the very strangeness of the book made it fascinating. Taken not only as a divine philosophy of history, but as a philosophy of history packed with exact prediction of the unfolding future, it exercised an irresistible influence on the Christian consciousness. But, the doctrine of inspiration and the conception of the canon being in process of restatement, the elements in the book which are foreign to our taste stand out in bold relief. A part of its imagery belongs to a world, social and political, from which we are remote. Its continuous mystical use of numbers goes against our grain. The coloring is not always to our natural liking. And, deeper than all, the mighty grip of the conception of evolution on our minds and wills puts us out of instinctive sympathy with that highly visualized view of the kingdom of God which seems to bring it down into history with a plunge. So the Apocalypse has paid heavy taxes to criticism.

But the times are ripe for a deeper appreciation. We possess a rapidly growing body of knowledge pertaining to the first century and to the life of the Christian church within that century. This enables us to place the Apocalypse in intimate and quickening relations with the Roman Empire on the one side and on the other with the inner mind, with the interior labor of the church viewed as an aggressive and heroic community devoted to supreme moral and spiritual ends. We may therefore look for increasing study of the Apocalypse. Ramsay's *Letters to the Seven Churches* (1905) and the book before us are in evidence.

Swete's *Commentary* has already gone into a second edition. For a commentary which is in the best sense scholarly, in which the homiletical element, while strong, is controlled, this is a notable success. It is due in part to the fact that it is the first thoroughly critical commentary done in English. But in part it is due to the high merits of the book itself.

The author takes a conservative position on the question of the unity of the Apocalypse. It is a natural and wholesome protest against the

results of documentary analysis as practiced since the appearance of Völter's book in 1885. These results, whether imaginary or real, are tainted by a preconception in favor of documentary analysis borrowed from the Old Testament critic. The New Testament critic, while assuming the possibility of documentary strata, should hold his judgment in suspense until a long and patient study has brought all the qualities and idioms of the book to light. And beyond question, in some modern instances, the brilliancy of documentary analysis has been disproportional to the depth and thoroughness of exegetical knowledge. Swete emphasizes the literary unity of the Apocalypse, and the operation clear through it of a creative imagination of the highest order. He recognizes the possibility of "fragments" of an older book (e. g., 11:1 and 17:10). But regarding the Apocalypse as it lies before us, he is a thoroughgoing believer in its unity. One cannot but feel that he does not do full justice to the fact of corporate authorship in the first century. The heroic age of Christianity was brief. The creative imagination of the new prophetism soon lost its vigor. But during its prime it may well have had power to stamp upon the members of an apocalyptic brotherhood or "school" a degree of unity in conception and literary workmanship, to which modern standards present a very poor parallel.

Swete also holds firmly to the traditional view that the Apostle John is the author of the Apocalypse, while regarding the Fourth Gospel he admits (p. civ) that the Johannine authorship "is open and perhaps will always be open to doubt." His position marks an interesting milestone in the progress of conservative English opinion. At this important point it adopts in large degree the opinion of Baur, against which for a long time it strongly and almost fiercely protested.

He does not face or handle the Johannine problem in its entirety. In the present state of knowledge and opinion, that may not be possible. Perhaps it is not even desirable. Our greatest need in the New Testament field is the thorough monographing of individual books. We have had enough and more than enough of constructive generalization. Yet the argument for the Johannine authorship of the Apocalypse would have stood on solider ground, if he had given more space to the Johannine question as a whole.

Regarding the date he is very positive, in favor of the reign of Domitian. As far as the choice between the Neronian date and the Domitian date is concerned, his certainty is within bounds. Our growing knowledge of the first century goes to the support of the early tradition which dated the book from Domitian's reign. But here again Swete pays too little

attention to the possible results of corporate authorship. The Apocalypse may have undergone a second edition in the reign of Trajan.

The principle of interpretation adopted is an attempt at a compromise between the "futurists," or those who find a body of prediction in the book, and the "preterists," or those who take the book to be a religious philosophy of accomplished events (pp. ccxvi-ccxviii). But when we come to the application of the principle to specific exegesis, it may be doubted whether we find enough "futurism" to make the term worth while. If, for example, the comment on 6:15 ("Not only officials will be terror-struck by the signs of an approaching end, but all classes of society; wealth and physical strength will afford no security") be "futurism," then the strictest "preterist" of an earlier day was also a "futurist." The "futurism" of Swete's interpretation comes close to being a negligible quantity. The question at stake between the two schools had its whole point here. Does the Apocalypse contain a body of specific tradition? Put the question in this way and Swete answers no (p. ccxvi). To call what is left "preterism" and to put the result forward as a comprehensive principle doing justice to both of the schools, is a procedure that is not likely to contribute to clearness of thought or exactness in terminology.

Swete does ample justice to the Caesar-cult both as an occasioning cause in the publication of the Apocalypse and as a continuous element in its thinking. He does not, however, do full justice to the heathen side of the great debate. He speaks (p. xc) of the refusal, on the part of Christians, to offer incense to the emperor's image, as exposing them "to the charge of disloyalty both to the provincial authority and to the emperor." As a matter of fact, the heathen were right in their charge. No matter how high the motive of the Christian was, it was an action that every level-headed and deep-minded heathen must perforce regard as disloyalty. The worship of the emperor was an inevitable and instinctive action on the part of the empire. State and church being one, and religion being what it was, this was the only way in which the state could insure, in terms of religion, the public peace and common welfare. Although the movement began in Asia Minor, in the first century Italy was as far on as the provinces. Mau's fine book on Pompeii shows how large a part the worship of the Caesars played in an Italian town of possibly 20,000 people. It was the inevitable action of the whole empire. Christians, in refusing to share it, were actually guilty of high treason.

The commentary abounds in happy and pregnant interpretations. Combining the standards of the general reader and the New Testament critic, it may be safely said to be the best commentary of our time upon

the Apocalypse. But it has one serious defect. It does not, by its distribution of emphasis and book-space, bring out fully the genius of the book. The books of Scripture should be treated according to their kind. The Johannine Apocalypse belongs to the class of great poems. Under qualifications, it should be studied as the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus is studied. Swete says with truth (Preface, p. ix) "that the Apocalypse offers to the pastors of the Christian church an unrivaled store of materials for Christian teaching." But the true way to bring the Apocalypse once more close to the heart of Christians is to study it as the expression of the creative imagination serving the creative moralizing will. The will and the imagination are inseparable. It is through the imagination that the will asserts its right of way through history. The emphasis should therefore fall upon the imagination. But Swete, in the distribution and economy of his space, keeps within the conventional lines and bounds of exegesis. For example, more space is given to the question of the Nicolaitans than to the incomparable imagery of 12:1 ff. In more than one place we look for an imaginative interpretation of a supreme imagination and find, in its stead, accurate archaeology. But no amount of archaeology will render the Apocalypse, what it must become in order to be appreciated, inevitable, as all great poetry is inevitable.

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The Bible Doctrine of Atonement. Six lectures given in Westminster Abbey by H. C. BEECHING, D.LITT., Canon of Westminster, AND ALEXANDER NAIRNE, M.A., Professor of Hebrew in King's College, London. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1907. Pp. 110. \$1.00.

On first glancing at a book of this kind the thought arises that it is impossible to deal, in any satisfactory way, with such a large subject in such a small space; but on reading the lectures we are led to the conclusion that the author has done really fine work notwithstanding the severe limitations which the circumstances required. If one were disposed to cavil, it might be objected that there is really no such thing as a Bible doctrine of atonement. What we have is a historical movement containing varied ideas from many points of view, and from these we must construct our doctrine of "atonement," or of man's relation to God and the position that the idea of sacrifice holds in this statement of the communion of the sinner with his Savior. Those who know the difficulty of finding a short satisfactory title for any really suggestive book are not likely to indulge in